

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-06 ISO-00 SCA-01 H-03 L-03 /017 W

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R 251509Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2366

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FOR EUR/SOV AND SCA/SCS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UR CPRS

SUBJECT: CONFISCATION OF STATUES

REF: MOSCOW 9480

1. DEPT REQUESTED TO ADVISE OFFICE OF SENATOR GRIFFIN OF SUBSTANCE OF FOLLOWING WITH REGARD TO JUNE 16 CONFISCATION OF SEVEN BRONZE STATUES FROM CONSTITUENT SIDNEY CRICOW, SOUTHFIELD, MICHIGAN.
2. ON SEPTEMBER 24, AFTER COLLECTING NECESSARY PAPERS TO CLAIM STATUES, INCLUDING ORIGINAL CUSTOMS RECEIPT AND EMBASSY POWER OF ATTORNEY, EMBASSY DESPATCHED CHAUFFEUR TO SHEREMETYEVO AIRPORT CUSTOMS OFFICE TO COLLECT STATUES (VALUE 690 RUBLES). AT CUSTOMS OFFICE, HOWEVER, CHAUFFEUR WAS INFORMED (BY INSPECTOR SHIROKOVA) THAT STATUES HAD BEEN "SOLD" AND FUNDS HAD GONE TO STATE.
3. ON RECEIPT REPORT, CONSOFF IMMEDIATELY PROTESTED BY TELEPHONE TO MOSCOW CUSTOMS (SENIOR INSPECTOR KRYUCHAREV), WHICH HAD ASSURED EMBASSY AUGUST 8 THAT BRONZES WOULD BE RETURNED (REFTEL). KRYUCHAREV EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT REPORT, SAYING EMBASSY UNDERSTANDING THAT STATUES WOULD BE RETURNED WAS CORRECT, AND HE WOULD HAVE TO INVESTIGATE.
4. ON SEPTEMBER 25, KRYUCHAREV TELEPHONED CONSOFF AND CONFIRMED THAT BRONZE STATUES HAD BEEN "SOLD" BY "MISTAKE." PRESSED

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TO ELABORATE, KRYUCHAREV SAID SHEREMETYEVO CUSTOMS EVIDENTLY

DID NOT RECEIVE "WORD" FROM MAIN CUSTOMS OFFICE (KRYUCHAREV'S SUPERVISORY ORGANIZATION) THAT STATUES WERE TO BE RETURNED, OR, ALTERNATIVELY, RECEIVED WORD AND DID NOT COMPLY. KRYUCHAREV, WHO HAS DEALT FAIRLY WITH EMBASSY IN PAST ON CONSULAR BUSINESS, SEEMED AMAZED THAT SALE COULD TAKE PLACE BUT OFFERED NO HOPE FOR RECOVERY OF STATUES OR THEIR VALUE. HE AGREED THAT EMBASSY NOTE TO FOREIGN MINISTRY WOULD APPEAR TO BE ONLY APPROPRIATE COURSE OF ACTION IN LIGHT OF DEVELOPMENT. IN FACT HE SEEMED ANXIOUS THAT EMBASSY PURSUE CASE.

5. COMMENT: GIVING SOVIET AUTHORITIES BENEFIT OF DOUBT, IT APPEARS THERE WAS COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN BETWEEN MOSCOW CUSTOMS, MAIN CUSTOMS, AND AIRPORT CUSTOMS OFFICE. IN VIEW OF KRYUCHAREV'S EVIDENT INTEREST IN SEEING EMBASSY PURSUE CASE, WE DO NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, THAT CORRUPT OFFICIALS OF AIRPORT SIMPLY SEIZED AND SOLD STATUES FOR THEIR OWN PROFIT. WHILE IT IS UNLIKELY THAT STATUES THEMSELVES CAN BE RECOVERED, EMBASSY WILL REQUEST THEIR RETURN, OR EQUIVALENT IN VALUE, IN NOTE TO MFA. MR, CRICOW SHOULD BE SO ADVISED.
DECON 9/31/77
DUBS

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